

Statement of Congressman Tom Udall (NM-3rd)
Floor Statement
Introduction of Military Families Leave Act
April 14, 2005

Mr. Speaker,

I rise today to introduce the Military Families Leave Act, a bill that will take a small step to help ease the burden of military families in this country. I originally introduced this bill at the end of the 108th Congress, and I look forward to working for its passage during the 109th Congress.

Nearly everyday we hear stories about the hardships of the families of our nation's soldiers. Family members of deployed soldiers face unique challenges, especially in the first days and weeks after the member has been summoned to duty. The National Military Family Association has testified that it hears from many families about the difficulties of balancing new family and personal requirements with their regular duties when a family member is deployed. As members of Congress, we too hear from constituents who struggle with this balance. I believe there are measures we can take to ease this burden and increase flexibility in the lives of our military family members.

The legislation I am introducing today is one of the steps we can take. The Military Families Leave Act allows spouses, parents, or children of military personnel who are serving on, or are called to active duty, in support of a contingency operation to use their Family and Medical Leave Act benefits for issues directly related to deployment. The bill does not extend the FMLA to anyone; it simply allows those who already qualify for the FMLA to use that benefit in new specific instances. For example, if a woman's husband is deployed for a contingency operation, she can use her FMLA benefit to secure power of attorney or to arrange for necessary childcare. Or, in a single parent situation, the mother or father of the deployed servicemember could use his or her FMLA benefit to care for a grandchild. This bill has been carefully drafted to stipulate that this leave could only be taken for issues directly relating to or resulting from the deployment of a family member.

Senator Russ Feingold of Wisconsin has introduced the Senate companion to this bill, which has garnered widespread support from military reserve, active duty, and military family organizations. I would like to submit for the record support letters from the Reserve Enlisted Association and Reserve Officers Association, the National Military Family Association, the Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States, and the National Partnership of Women and Families. Others who support this bill include the Military Officers Association of America and the National Guard Association of the United States.

It is time to show our military families that we are listening to their concerns. The Military Families Leave Act represents a small measure of relief for the families of the men and women who serve in our armed forces. I ask that my colleagues join me in assisting our military families by supporting this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.